

United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, D. C. 20548

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY  
Expected at 10 a.m.D.S.T.  
Wednesday, May 20, 1970

STATEMENT OF  
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THE UNITED STATES  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND ASTRONAUTICS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ON

H.R. 17046, 91st CONGRESS, A BILL to  
establish an Office of Technology Assessment  
for the Congress as an aid in the identifica-  
tion and consideration of existing and probable  
impacts of technological application; to amend  
the National Science Foundation Act of 1950; and  
for other purposes.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you to discuss H.R. 17046, 91st Congress, which has as its primary purpose to establish an Office of Technology Assessment as an arm of the Congress to aid in the identification and consideration of existing and probable impact on technological application. You will recall that on December 4, 1969, when I appeared before you during your inquiry into technology assessment I discussed the role that the General Accounting Office could or should play in this area. 071445

Three of the responsibilities charged to the Comptroller General under section 312 of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 are of particular importance in the present consideration. These are:

- (1) investigating all matters relating to the application of public funds;
- (2) making investigations and reports ordered by either House of Congress or by committees having jurisdiction over revenues, appropriations, or expenditures, and
- (3) directing assistants from his Office, upon request of these Committees, to furnish them such advice and information as may be requested.

We view these provisions as a broad charter within which to serve the information needs of the Congress and have therefore extended our assistance to all Committees of the Congress.

Needless to say, we will work closely with this and other Committees so that our reviews will be directed to areas of maximum interest to the Congress.

With regard to H.R. 17046, its declaration of purpose clearly states the need for a mechanism which will give the Congress an effective means to secure competent unbiased information on the effects of technology and the utilization of such information as one element in the legislative assessment of matters pending before the Congress.

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/ This Office would be headed by a Director and a Technology Assessment Board consisting of six named Government officials including the Comptroller General and seven members appointed from outside the Federal Government by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Board would appoint the Director, and the basic responsibilities of the Office, as stated in subsection 3(c), would be to provide an early warning of the probable impacts of the applications of technology and to develop other coordinate information which may assist the Congress in determining the relative priorities of programs before it. Subsection 3(c) lists eight specific functions to be included in the basic responsibilities. UT11+ 56

The language of the bill is not clear as to whether the Director of the Office of Technology as an ex officio member of the Technology Assessment Board would be a voting or nonvoting member. We suggest that the bill state more clearly what is intended. While there are arguments pro and con on this matter; on balance we feel that the Director should be a voting member of the Board. It should be noted

however that the addition of the Director as a voting member would result in a fourteen member board with the potential for tie votes. We therefore suggest that in the event it is decided to have the Director a voting member, the public members provided for in subsection 4(a)(5) be reduced from seven to six.

With regard to the public members of the Board, subsection 4(a)(5) lists the qualification factors for appointment. Included in the list is the qualification that such persons may be judged qualified "on the basis of contributions made to educational or public affairs." We suggest that the term "public affairs" be changed to "public activities" because, in today's parlance, the term "public affairs" might be restrictively interpreted to mean persons engaged in public relations work.

Subsection 6(a)(3) authorizes the Office to enter into contracts and other arrangements "without legal consideration." Except in emergency circumstances such an exemption has generally been considered by our Office as contrary to the Government's interest. Also, this subsection is silent as to whether reimbursement of costs of activities carried on for the Office by executive departments and agencies as provided in the Economy Act, 31 U.S.C. 686, will be required and under the language of this subsection territories and possessions of the United States are the only entities not covered as prospective participants. We therefore suggest that the language of subsection 6(a)(3) be revised to read as follows:

"enter into such contracts or other arrangements as may be necessary for the conduct of its work with any agency or instrumentality of the United States, foreign countries,

and international agencies, or with any State, Territory, or possession or with any political subdivision thereof, or with any person, firm, association, corporation, or educational institution, with or without reimbursement, without performance or other bonds, and without regard to section 3709 of the Revised Statutes (41 U.S.C. 5)."

With further regard to the contractual authority stated in subsection 6(a)(3), we suggest that there be included in the bill a requirement that, for those contracts or other arrangements that involve costs to the Government, contractors and parties to other arrangements maintain adequate records in such manner as may be prescribed by the Director and that such records shall be available to the Office and the Comptroller General or his authorized representatives for purposes of audit and examination.

This purpose could be met by the addition of language along the following lines as a new subsection 6(a)(7):

"(7) Contractors and other parties entering into contracts and other arrangements under this section which involve costs to the Government shall maintain such books and related records as will facilitate an effective audit in such detail and in such manner as shall be prescribed by the Director and such books, documents, papers and records shall be available to the Director and the Comptroller General or any of their duly authorized representatives for the purpose of audit and examination."

Subsection 6(b) would authorize the Director, in accordance with such policies as the Board shall prescribe, to employ and fix the compensation of such technical and professional personnel as he may deem necessary without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of such title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates. We are not aware of a need to exempt technical and professional personnel from these provisions and we would recommend that there be some ceiling on salaries.

Section 7 sets out in considerable detail the services that the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress shall perform for the Office. In my testimony of December 4, 1969, I stated that the Legislative Reference Service is well equipped to provide information and analyses of a background nature for use in evaluating new proposals but that our Office is perhaps better equipped to undertake longer range studies of ongoing programs, to assess benefits and costs, the need for management improvement, and similar considerations. We can and do provide considerable assistance to Congressional Committees in their consideration of legislative proposals. In fact about twenty percent of our professional staff this year will be providing such assistance.

At that time I outlined in some detail the role that the General Accounting Office could or should play in the area of technology assessment and cited several illustrative cases of work we had done which we believe is particularly relevant to the purposes of H.R. 17046.

In our work we have placed increased emphasis on whether funds expended are achieving the program objectives intended by the Congress. Because many of the programs and activities for which the Congress has authorized funds involve the promotion or control of technology, the application of technology to meet an existing problem or need, or the treatment of problems brought about by technological change or progress, our work necessarily involves us in the area which is the subject of H.R. 17046. As program objectives become more concerned with and provide recognition of the impact of technological application our Office will, in the ordinary course of its activities, automatically gear our reviews to include more disclosures which show the impact of technology.

We do not believe that the Congress intended that the GAO initiate or be called upon to initiate new program proposals to deal with technological, social, economic, or other problems or needs. Nor do we believe it was intended that we initiate recommendations with respect to funding levels or budget priorities.

It is clear, however, that the GAO can and should direct its work in a way which will provide information concerning the results of authorized programs and activities which will be useful to the Congress and its committees in making judgments on these matters.

In this regard we have been concentrating on increasing the capability of our professional staff not only through training but also by adding professional staff educated in other disciplines such as economic, business administration, mathematics, engineering, and systems analysis. We have found outside consultants on an intermittent basis to be of great value and we expect to increase our use of them.

For these reasons and to obviate any question of the authority of GAO to provide services to the Office in addition to the financial and administrative services provided for under section 10, we suggest that subsection 7(a) be revised to list the Comptroller General and the General Accounting Office along with the Librarian of Congress and the Legislative Reference Service.

We question the desirability of listing in detail in subsection 7(b) the services and assistance to be rendered by the Legislative Reference Service. With such detail stated in the legislation it could be argued that the Board, the Office, and the Director are all preempted in what might be requested of the Legislative Reference Service. While these precise functions might well be spelled out administratively, it is our feeling that as a matter of administration it would be better to leave this matter as flexible as possible. Accordingly, we have suggested the deletion of subsection 7(b).

We recommend the enactment of H.R. 17046 and stand ready to work in close cooperation with the proposed Office if it is established.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. We will be pleased to respond to any questions you and the members of the subcommittee might have.